

VERNON WILSON

*Note: This is the **second** in a series of three articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2004 inductees are Reggie Jackson of Nicholls St. and Vernon Wilson of Northwestern St. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2004 is former De La Salle and St. Aloysius High School coach Johnny Altobello.*

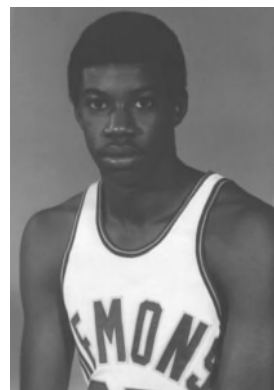
NORTHWESTERN STATE ALL-AMERICAN VERNON WILSON SET TO ENTER LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

By: Pesky Hill
Written for the LABC

NATCHITOCHES, LA -- "He jumps. He shoots. He scores!"

That was the familiar phrase of longtime Northwestern State University broadcaster Norm Fletcher when he called games involving All-American Vernon Wilson from 1970 to 1973.

Wilson, a product of Logansport Rosenwald High School and now living in Shreveport, will be inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame on May 1 in Baton Rouge, along with former Nicholls St. star Reggie Jackson.



"This really means a lot to me," Wilson admitted. "I really expected to play some pro ball when I got out of college but it just didn't work out for me. This honor ranks me with Louisiana's best."

The 6-3, 180-pound Wilson was a versatile player for Coach Tynes Hildebrand's Northwestern St. Demons. When he graduated, Wilson's 20.6 career scoring average was the best in Northwestern St. history.

"He (Wilson) was very good on defense," Hildebrand said. "And he could rebound well for his size. I don't think there is anybody more deserving of this honor."

Hildebrand likes to talk about the way he used Wilson to torment defenses. "When he would post up low, you just couldn't stop him," Hildebrand said. "From the free throw line on in, he may have been the best player that ever played in Louisiana."

Wilson's career at Northwestern St. was delayed a year when he signed with Grambling St. out of high school. After attending GSU in the summer, he transferred to Northwestern in the fall of 1969.

“I thought I would have a better chance to play at Northwestern,” Wilson explained. “I didn’t want to go to a school and sit on the bench. Although I had to sit out a year, Northwestern gave me a quicker chance to play.”

And play he did.

In fact, Wilson averaged 20.3 points per game his sophomore season and was named the Gulf States Conference Rookie of the Year in 1971.

As a junior, Wilson had his best season scoring with a 21.7 average, earning second team All-Louisiana honors. In 1973 he capped off his illustrious career by being named a first team NAIA All-American and first team All-Louisiana selection. He scored 19.9 points per game that season, including a career high 37 against LSUNO and 36 versus Southern Mississippi.

“I thought I had one of my better games against Centenary,” Wilson said of his 35-point outburst against the Gents as a junior. “I also had some good games against USL back when they had some great players.”

Wilson finished his career as the fifth most prolific scorer in Northwestern St. history with 1,548 points.

“I’m sure Vernon and I will always wonder how many more points he would have scored if he had gotten that fourth year,” Hildebrand said. “Who knows? Maybe a scout would have seen him and he would have gotten a shot in the pros.”

Hildebrand said Wilson’s long arms and big hands helped make him better. “I could out jump most guards,” Wilson said. “I had the moves around the basket. I had the mentality of a big man.”

Today, Wilson makes his moves as a teacher and coach at North DeSoto Middle School.

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, which is located in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center, is sponsored by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches (LABC). The Hall of Fame was created in 1975 to honor former great basketball players and coaches from Louisiana colleges. You can learn more about the LABC and the Hall of Fame by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the LABC's 30th Annual Hall of Fame Awards Banquet. The awards banquet, sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge on Saturday, May 1, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.

In addition to the induction of the new Hall of Fame members, the banquet will include recognition of Louisiana’s major college, small college, junior college and high school players and coaches of the year, the top pro player from the state, and the presentation of the prestigious Mr.

Louisiana Basketball award to former De La Salle and St. Aloysius High School coach Johnny Altobello.

Tickets for the banquet are \$15 and can be obtained by contacting the LABC at labball@gmail.com. The Embassy Suites Hotel is located at 4914 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10).

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